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26
MONSTRESS
2019 HUGO AWARD WINNER

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THE STORY SO FAR...

The world is at war. In the wake of a bomb set off in the Cumaean holy city of Aurum, long-simmering tensions between humans and Arcanics have boiled over into open conflict. Maika Halfwolf knows who started this war – her father, the Lord Doctor, whose clandestine Blood Court seeks ultimate power. But neither she nor Zinn, the Monstrum who lives inside her and once inhabited the Lord Doctor, can hope to halt what the bombing has set in motion.

Maika knows she must find the pieces of the Shaman-Empress's mask, an object that even in fragments has already proved capable of releasing the long-imprisoned Monstra, whose destructive power would make the current war look like a playground fight. On the way, however, she's agreed to follow Lord Corvin and Kippa to Ravenna, a fortified city directly in the Human Federation's line of attack. There, they hope to rescue Corvin's healer sister and the refugee fox Arcanics that Kippa has promised to help. But during their airship journey, Corvin and Kippa made a horrifying discovery: overnight, Maika and Zinn devoured all of the airship's disloyal crew members.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

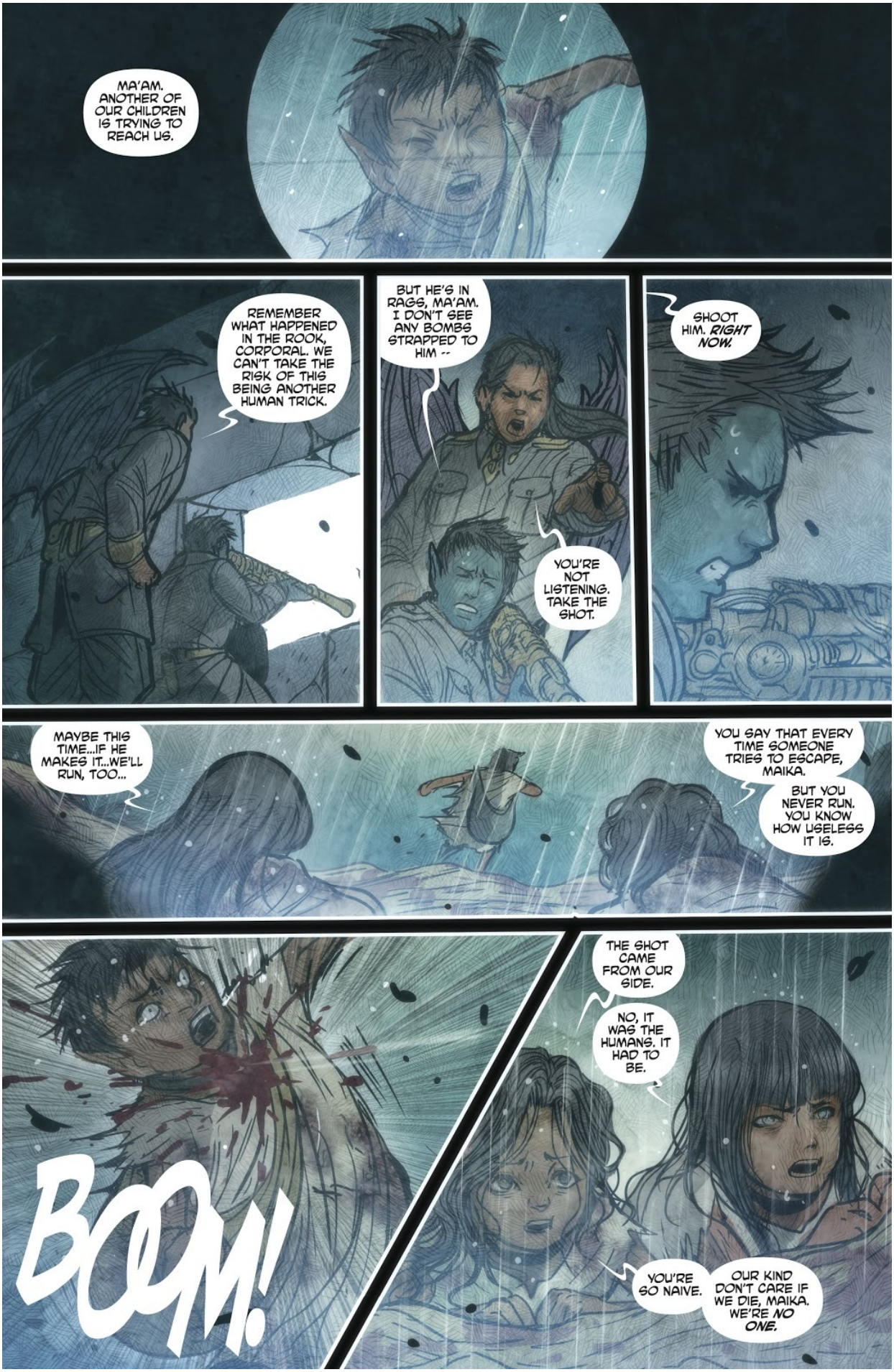
KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

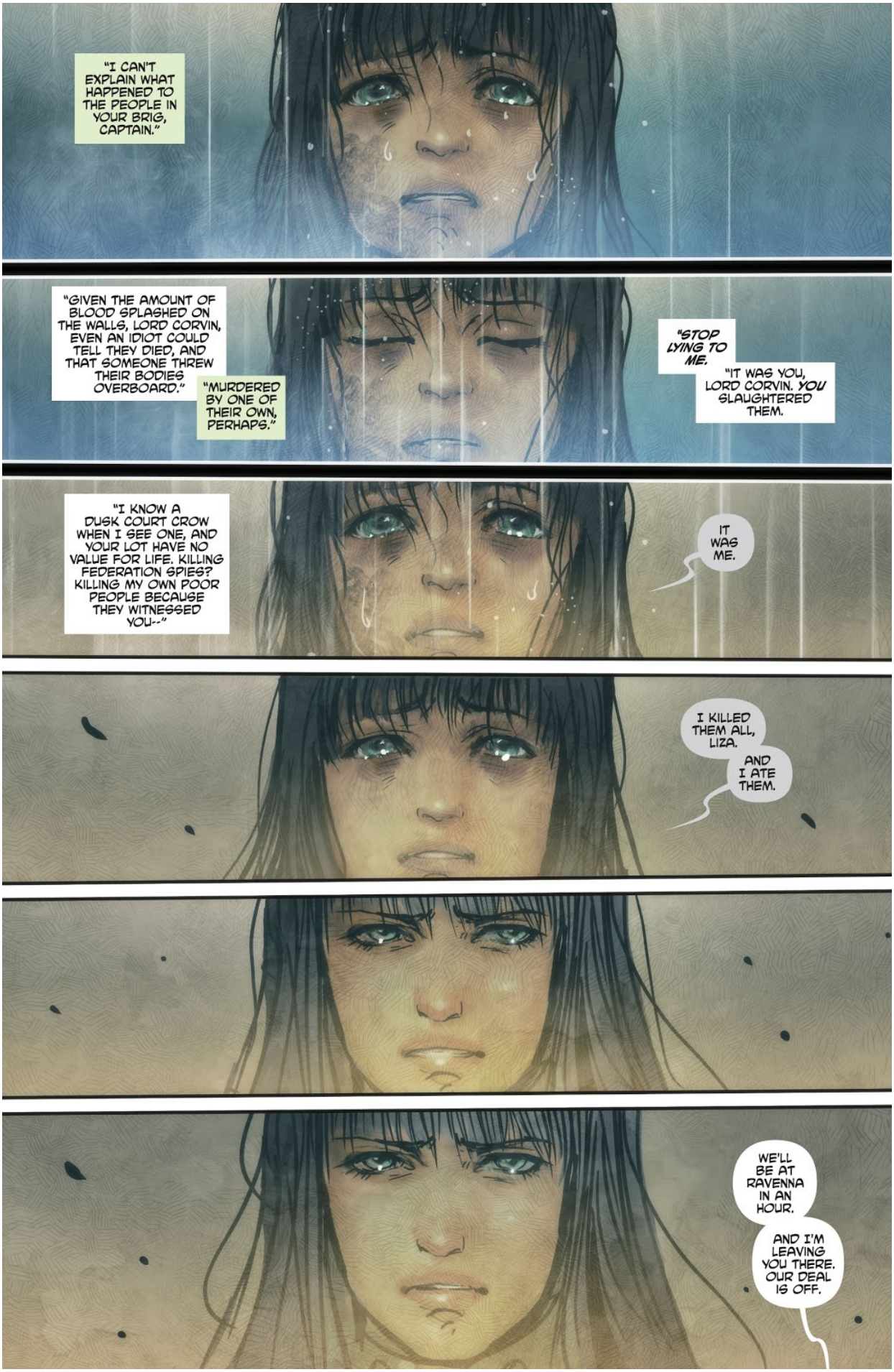
SIR CORVIN D'ORO An Arcanic Lord, First Watchman of the Court and Commander of the Inner Wall. He is loyal to the Dusk Court but has willingly defied their orders because of his desire to protect Maika and his belief that she can and will serve a greater purpose.

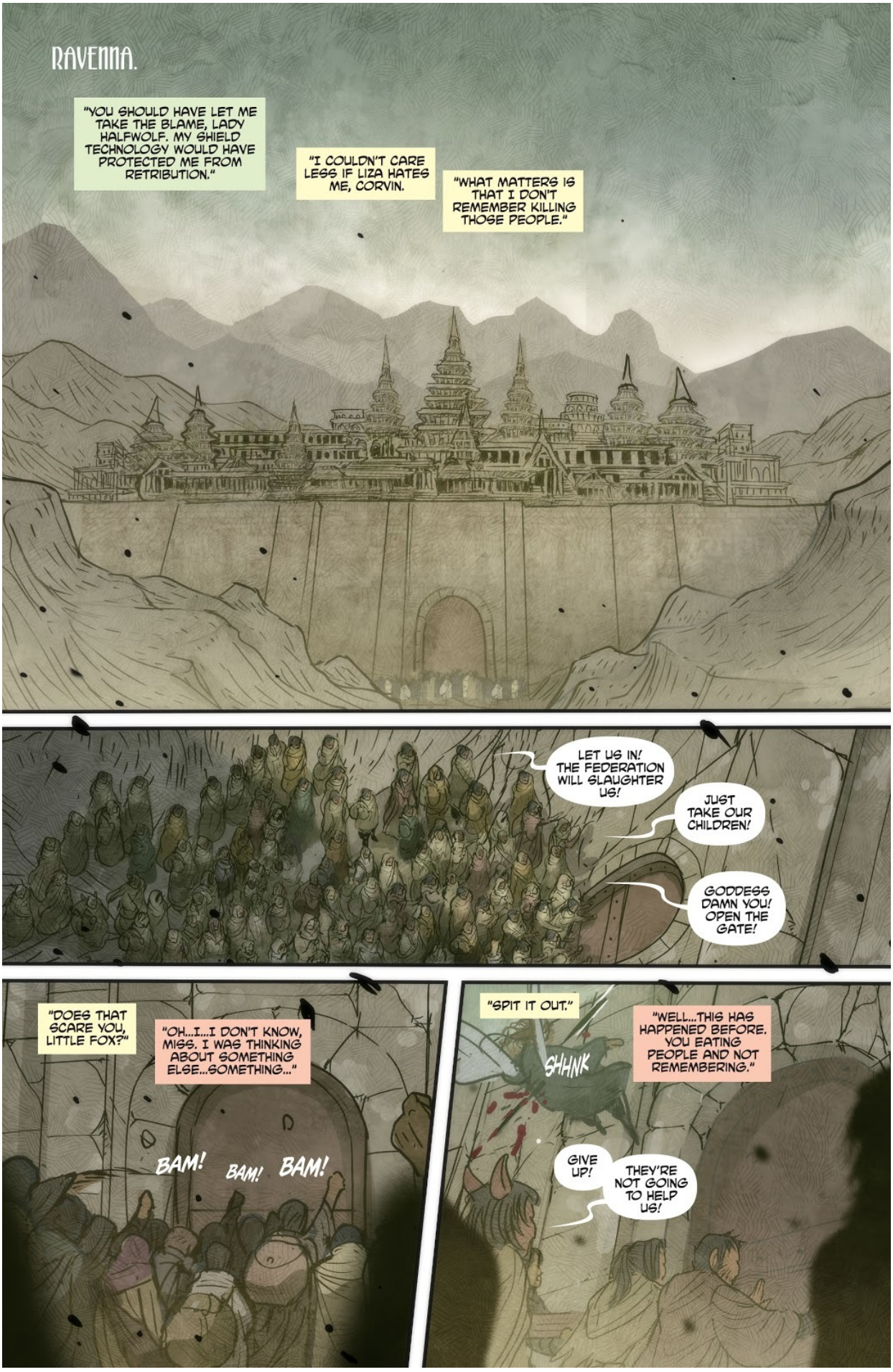
TUYA Maika's closest friend in the world, who has been with her since before the Battle of Constantine. Unbeknownst to Maika, she is also the Baroness of the Last Dusk, a high-level member of the Arcanic Dusk Court tasked with containing — or even destroying — Maika's power.

WARLORD The Dawn Court's "Sword of the East," twin sister of Moriko Halfwolf, and Maika's aunt. Ruthless in her ambition, the Warlord's greatest desire is to unravel the mystery behind the destruction of Constantine. She believes the secrets of Constantine will protect the Arcanics in their impending war against the humans — but she does not realize that the answers she seeks lie within her young niece.

CONSTANTINE. SIX YEARS AGO.
AIEEEE!
KPOW! KPOW!
KPOW! KPOW!
AIEEEEEE!
KPOW! KPOW!
GUN, IN THE MUD.
TAKE IT. I SEE SOMETHING ELSE.
AIEEEEEE!
KPOW! KPOW!
YAHH!
KPOW! KPOW!
TUYA, STAY CLOSE! KEEP TALKING TO --
=GASP=
I WON'T...BE SCAVENGED... BY A FUCKING DEMON.
RRYAHH!
LET GO!
=HUFF=
=HUFF=
GONNA DO IT, GONNA DO IT...
OH, NO.


MA'AM. ANOTHER OF OUR CHILDREN IS TRYING TO REACH US.
REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED IN THE ROOK, CORPORAL. WE CAN'T TAKE THE RISK OF THIS BEING ANOTHER HUMAN TRICK.
BUT HE'S IN RAGS, MA'AM. I DON'T SEE ANY BOMBS STRAPPED TO HIM --
YOU'RE NOT LISTENING. TAKE THE SHOT.
SHOOT HIM. RIGHT NOW.
MAYBE THIS TIME...IF HE MAKES IT...WE'LL RUN, TOO...
YOU SAY THAT EVERY TIME SOMEONE TRIES TO ESCAPE, MAIKA.
BUT YOU NEVER RUN. YOU KNOW HOW USELESS IT IS.
BOOM!
THE SHOT CAME FROM OUR SIDE.
NO, IT WAS THE HUMANS. IT HAD TO BE.
YOU'RE SO NAIVE.
OUR KIND DON'T CARE IF WE DIE, MAIKA. WE'RE NO ONE.

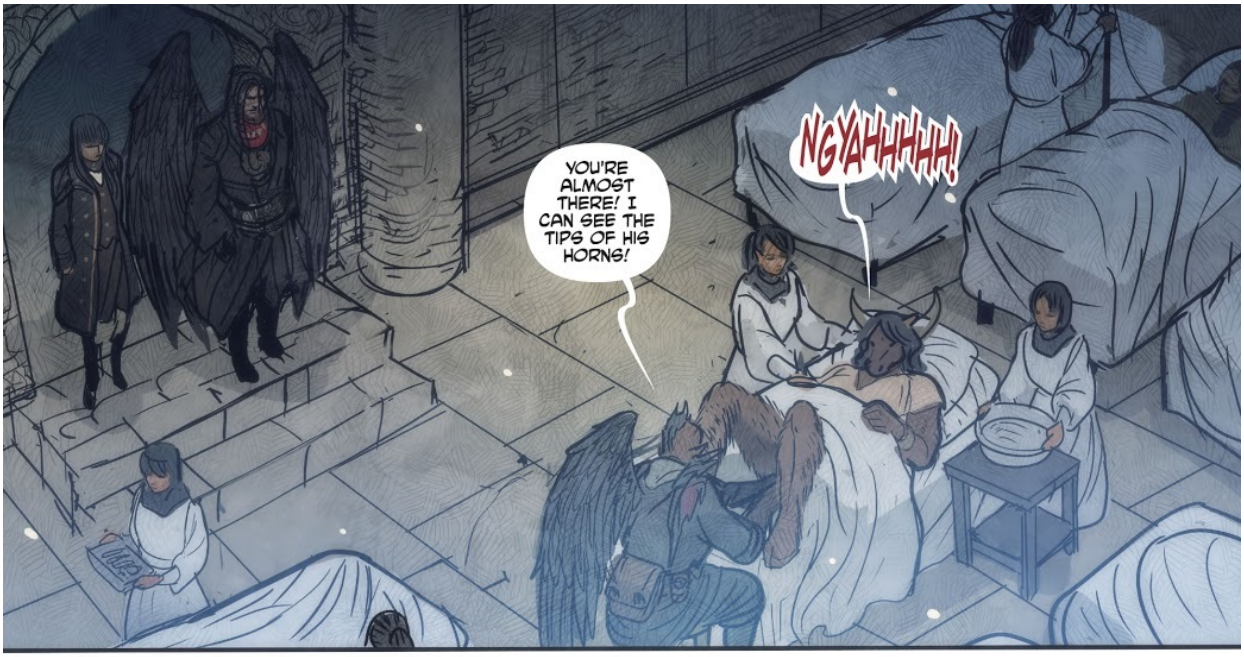

"I CAN'T EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PEOPLE IN YOUR BRIG, CAPTAIN."
"GIVEN THE AMOUNT OF BLOOD SPLASHED ON THE WALLS, LORD CORVIN, EVEN AN IDIOT COULD TELL THEY DIED, AND THAT SOMEONE THREW THEIR BODIES OVERBOARD."
"MURDERED BY ONE OF THEIR OWN, PERHAPS."
"STOP LYING TO ME.
"IT WAS YOU, LORD CORVIN. YOU SLAUGHTERED THEM.
"I KNOW A DUSK COURT CROW WHEN I SEE ONE, AND YOUR LOT HAVE NO VALUE FOR LIFE. KILLING FEDERATION SPIES? KILLING MY OWN POOR PEOPLE BECAUSE THEY WITNESSED YOU--"
IT WAS ME.
I KILLED THEM ALL, LIZA.
AND I ATE THEM.
WE'LL BE AT RAVENNA IN AN HOUR.
AND I'M LEAVING YOU THERE. OUR DEAL IS OFF.


RAVENNA.
"YOU SHOULD HAVE LET ME TAKE THE BLAME, LADY HALFWOLF. MY SHIELD TECHNOLOGY WOULD HAVE PROTECTED ME FROM RETRIBUTION."
"I COULDN'T CARE LESS IF LIZA HATES ME, CORVIN.
"WHAT MATTERS IS THAT I DON'T REMEMBER KILLING THOSE PEOPLE."
LET US IN! THE FEDERATION WILL SLAUGHTER US!
JUST TAKE OUR CHILDREN!
GODDESS DAMN YOU! OPEN THE GATE!
"DOES THAT SCARE YOU, LITTLE FOX?"
"OH...I...I DON'T KNOW, MISS. I WAS THINKING ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE...SOMETHING..."
BAM! BAM! BAM!
"SPIT IT OUT."
SHHNK
"WELL...THIS HAS HAPPENED BEFORE. YOU EATING PEOPLE AND NOT REMEMBERING."
GIVE UP!
THEY'RE NOT GOING TO HELP US!

THE BOY WE ESCAPED WITH, IN ZAMORA, AFTER YOU RESCUED ME FROM THE WITCHES.
I SAW YOU... DRAIN HIM...BUT YOU WERE SURPRISED WHEN I TOLD YOU...
...SO MAYBE THERE HAVE BEEN OTHERS THAT YOU DON'T REMEMBER...
THAT THE LADY HALFWOLF KILLS AND FEEDS IS HARDLY A SURPRISE, IS IT?
I WOULD ARGUE THAT WE HAVE A BIGGER PROBLEM AT HAND.
ALMOST A THOUSAND YEARS AGO, RAVENNA WAS FOUNDED BY CATS. AND THEN THEY MOVED ON, WITHOUT ANY EXPLANATION, AND THE DUSK COURT MOVED IN.
BUT CATS ALWAYS LIKE BACK DOORS. AND THIS IS THE SAFEST WAY INTO THE CITY RIGHT NOW.
JUST HOW BIG IS THIS TUNNEL?
BIG AS THE POETS, MIGS?

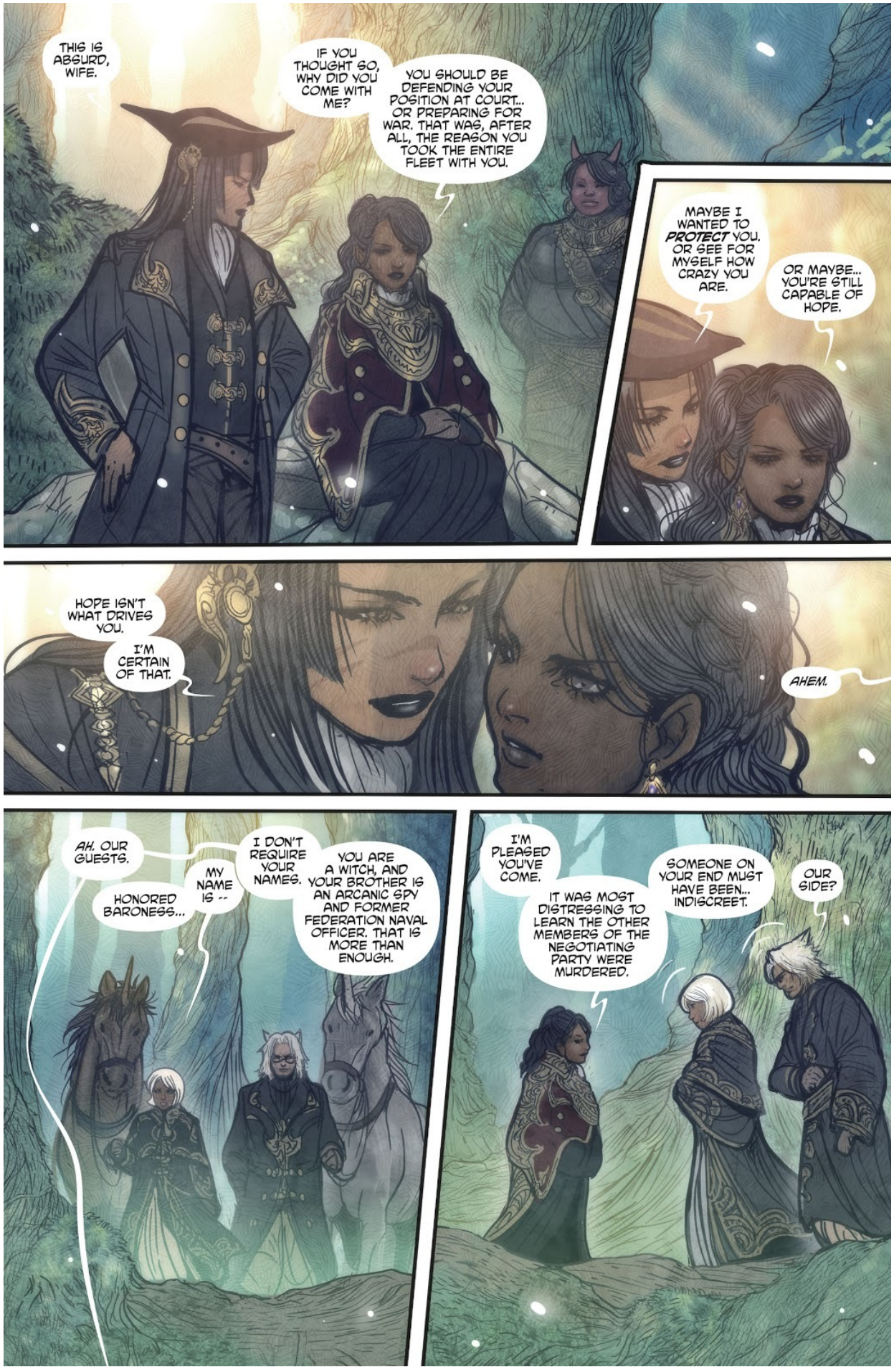
OH, FUCK ME.
PRAISE UBASTI, IN ALL HER GLORY AND -- OH!
A DUSK LORD!
THANK UBASTI...IS THE ARMY COMING? ARE WE SAVED?
I'M...NOT PERMITTED TO REVEAL ANYTHING ABOUT OUR MILITARY OPERATION...
...BUT I MUST FIND HEALER BETTANI D'ORO.

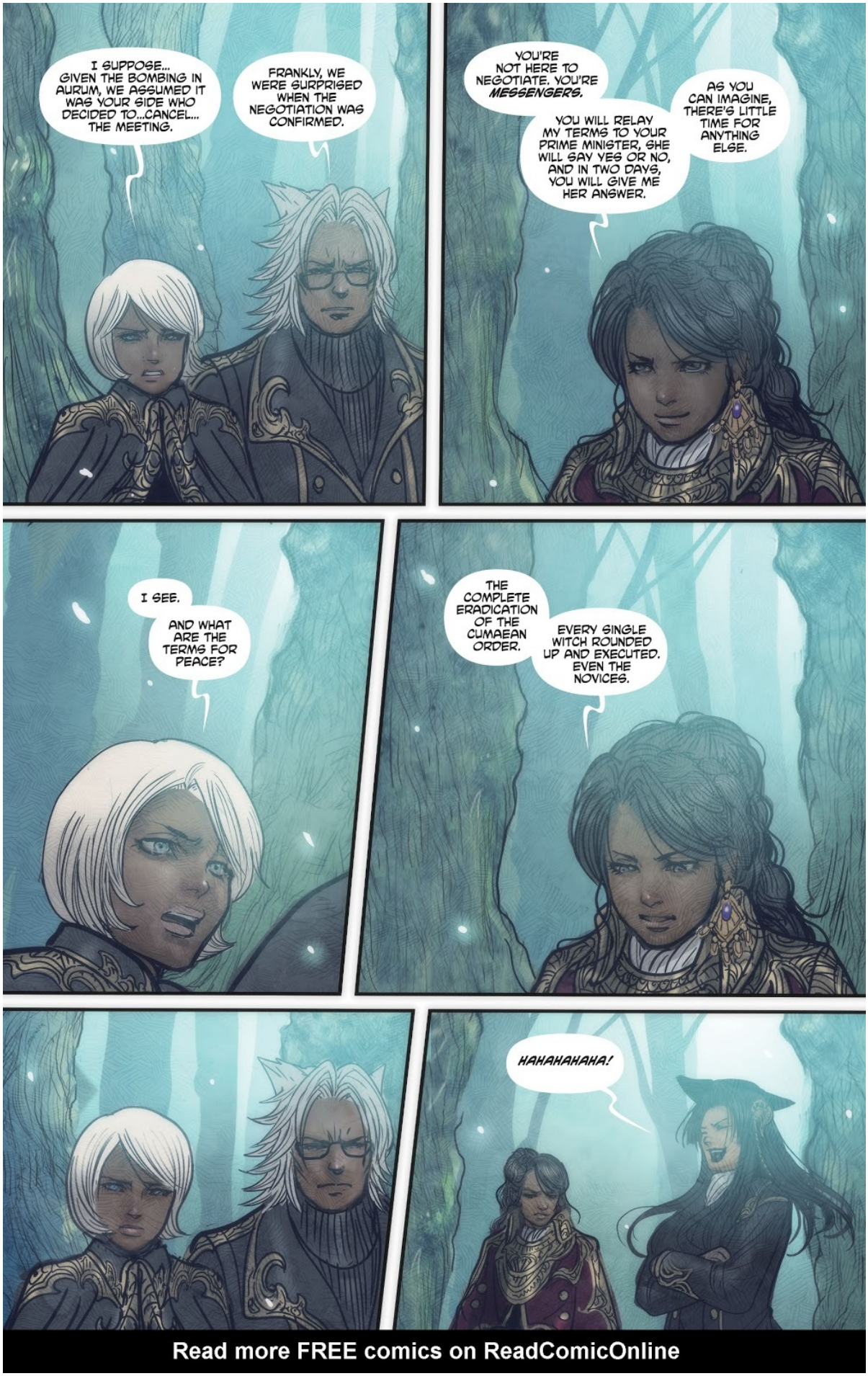
THIS PLACE IS A FUCKING MESS. YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO DEFEND YOURSELVES AT ALL IF THERE'S NO ORDER INSIDE THE CITY.
WHO'S IN COMMAND?
THE CITY LEADERS GRABBED THE FIRST AIRSHIPS THEY COULD, AND FLED. EVEN THE GARRISON COMMANDER STOWED AWAY.
PIECES OF SHIT.
A FEW VETERANS OF THE LAST WAR HAVE TRIED TO LEAD, BUT NO ONE RESPECTS THEIR AUTHORITY.
AND THERE'S BEEN NO ATTEMPT AT A FORMAL EVACUATION?
NO ONE WENT BEYOND THE WALL TO CONVINCE THE PEOPLE OUTSIDE THAT IT'S SAFER TO KEEP RUNNING?
THE RAVENNA CITY LEADERS, THE ONES WHO LEFT, TOLD EVERYONE THEY'D BE SAFER HERE...IT WAS THEIR WAY OF PREVENTING A RUSH FOR THE AIRSHIPS THEY COMMANDEERED.
NOW PEOPLE THINK IT'S TOO LATE TO RUN. *AND* THEY BELIEVE THE DUSK COURT OR THE SWORD OF THE EAST WILL COME SAVE THEM.
AND, THEY WERE RIGHT.
UBASTI ANSWERED OUR PRAYERS WITH YOUR ARRIVAL.


YOU'RE ALMOST THERE! I CAN SEE THE TIPS OF HIS HORNS!
NGYAHHHH!

BETTANI.
CORVIN. YOU GODDESS-DAMNED TURD.
W-WHAT? YOU CAN'T SPEAK TO MY BABY LIKE THAT!
WILL YOU BE QUIET AND PUSH!

A FATHER KILLED HIMSELF AND HIS CHILDREN THIS MORNING.
THAT CHILD I DELIVERED? WE'RE NOT LETTING THE MOTHER HAVE HIM RIGHT AWAY. WE'RE AFRAID SHE'LL SMOTHER HIM. THE CUMAEA LIKE BABIES.
THERE ARE PLENTY MORE WHO WOULD RATHER DIE THAN SUFFER THE POSSIBLITY OF THE SLAVE PENS.
I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW WHERE WE'RE AT, BIG BROTHER.
BEFORE YOU SAY SOMETHING NOBLE AND HIGH-MINDED, AND UNBEARABLY STUPID.
GIVEN WHAT I SAW OUT THERE, THE CITY GATES WILL FALL BEFORE THE FEDERATION ARRIVES.
AND, AT BEST, YOU HAVE ONLY A DAY OR SO BEFORE THE SHOOTING STARTS.
PFFT. AS IF THAT'S NEWS.
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE ALSO GOING TO TELL ME THE DUSK COURT ISN'T COMING TO SAVE US?
I KNOW ALL THIS, CORVIN, AND I'M STILL NOT LEAVING. SO WHY ARE YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS HERE...OTHER THAN TO WASTE MY TIME?
I'M HERE TO FIGHT FOR RAVENNA...
...ANY WAY I CAN.


THIS IS ABSURD, WIFE.
IF YOU THOUGHT SO, WHY DID YOU COME WITH ME?
YOU SHOULD BE DEFENDING YOUR POSITION AT COURT... OR PREPARING FOR WAR. THAT WAS, AFTER ALL, THE REASON YOU TOOK THE ENTIRE FLEET WITH YOU.
MAYBE I WANTED TO *PROTECT* YOU. OR SEE FOR MYSELF HOW CRAZY YOU ARE.
OR MAYBE... YOU'RE STILL CAPABLE OF HOPE.
HOPE ISN'T WHAT DRIVES YOU.
I'M CERTAIN OF THAT.
AHEM.
AH. OUR GUESTS.
HONORED BARONESS...
MY NAME IS --
I DON'T REQUIRE YOUR NAMES.
YOU ARE A WITCH, AND YOUR BROTHER IS AN ARCANIC SPY AND FORMER FEDERATION NAVAL OFFICER. THAT IS MORE THAN ENOUGH.
I'M PLEASED YOU'VE COME.
IT WAS MOST DISTRESSING TO LEARN THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE NEGOTIATING PARTY WERE MURDERED.
SOMEONE ON YOUR END MUST HAVE BEEN... INDISCREET.
OUR SIDE?


I SUPPOSE... GIVEN THE BOMBING IN AURUM, WE ASSUMED IT WAS YOUR SIDE WHO DECIDED TO...CANCEL... THE MEETING.
FRANKLY, WE WERE SURPRISED WHEN THE NEGOTIATION WAS CONFIRMED.
YOU'RE NOT HERE TO NEGOTIATE. YOU'RE *MESSENGERS.*
YOU WILL RELAY MY TERMS TO YOUR PRIME MINISTER, SHE WILL SAY YES OR NO, AND IN TWO DAYS, YOU WILL GIVE ME HER ANSWER.
AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, THERE'S LITTLE TIME FOR ANYTHING ELSE.
I SEE.
AND WHAT ARE THE TERMS FOR PEACE?
THE COMPLETE ERADICATION OF THE CUMAEAN ORDER.
EVERY SINGLE WITCH ROUNDED UP AND EXECUTED. EVEN THE NOVICES.
HAHAHAHAHA!

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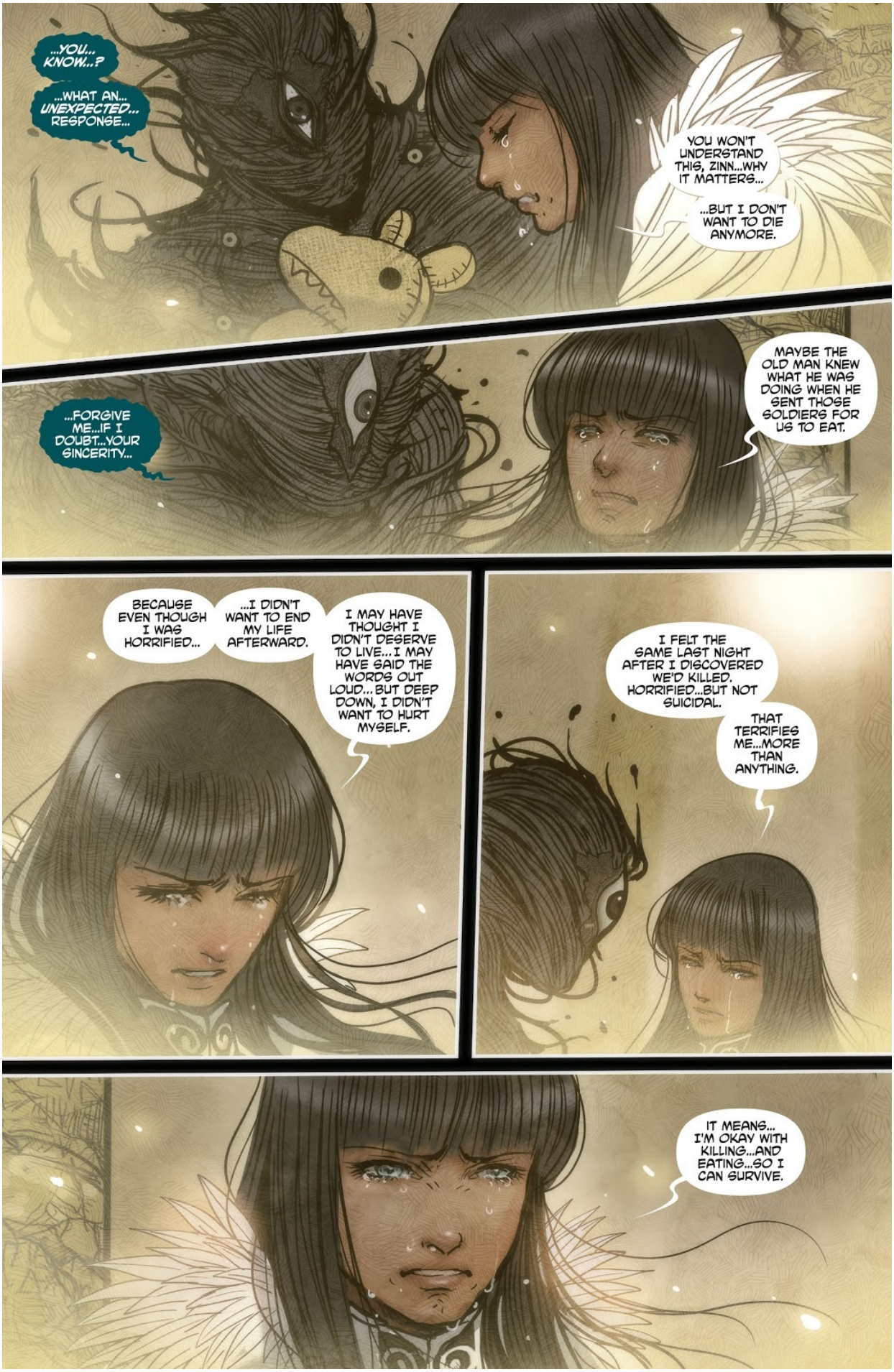
DO YOU REMEMER, ZINN, ALL THOSE STORIES OF MY CHILDHOOD?
BORN BY THE SEA, RAISED AS A FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTER? AND LOOK WHERE I ENDED UP.
IN THE DESERT, COUGHING UP SAND, AND APPRENTICED TO THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS HERSELF. WHAT A LIFE.
WELL, YOU WOULDN'T REMEMBER ANY OF THAT. NOT IF YOU'VE FORGOTTEN I EXISTED.
WHICH IS A SHAME, ISN'T IT? WE HAD SUCH GOOD TIMES TOGETHER.
I WAS THE FIRST PERSON TO MAKE YOU LAUGH. ME...A LOWLY HUMAN.
...THAT IS NOT...TRUE...
...YOU...ARE NOTHING...BUT A MISTAKE...OF MY MIND...
HARDLY, ZINN. WHY CAN'T YOU REMEMBER ALL YOUR ANGER? YOUR LONELINESS?
THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS...USING YOU AGAINST YOUR WILL...EVEN WHEN YOU BEGGED HER NOT TO?
I CAN STILL HEAR YOUR SCREAMS.
AND AFTERWARD, WHILE SHE SLEPT, YOU WOULD COME TO ME BECAUSE I WAS YOUR ONLY FRIEND...
OH... MY...
...AND HERE WE HAVE HER GREATEST EXPERIMENT OF ALL...
THE SHAMAN-PRINCESS LOOKS JUST LIKE HER MOTHER.
BUT ON THE INSIDE, IS SHE JUST LIKE HER FATH--

...ENOUGH...!
...ENOUGH...
ENOUGH WHAT? ENOUGH TALKING TO YOURSELF?
...BE SILENT... CHILD...
I CAN'T.
LAST NIGHT I KILLED, AND I WAS ASLEEP WHILE I DID IT. YOU...EMERGED... AND ATE.
WE *BOTH* ATE.
...I HAVE FED... SPORADICALLY...SINCE DEVOURING THE ENERGY...OF THE PONTUS SHIELD...
...AND HAVE BEEN... *DISTRACTED*... FROM MY GROWING HUNGER...
...NO MORE...
...NOT UNLESS YOU WISH...FOR ME...TO CONSUME...ANOTHER PART OF YOUR BODY...WHEN NEXT YOU REQUIRE...THE SHADOW OF MY...FULL STRENGTH...
AND YOU WILL... REQUIRE IT...AS I WILL REQUIRE...FAR MORE...THAN A FEW MORTAL BODIES...
YES. I KNOW.


...YOU... KNOW...?
...WHAT AN... UNEXPECTED... RESPONSE...
YOU WON'T UNDERSTAND THIS, ZINN...WHY IT MATTERS...
...BUT I DON'T WANT TO DIE ANYMORE.
...FORGIVE ME...IF I DOUBT...YOUR SINCERITY...
MAYBE THE OLD MAN KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING WHEN HE SENT THOSE SOLDIERS FOR US TO EAT.
BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH I WAS HORRIFIED...
...I DIDN'T WANT TO END MY LIFE AFTERWARD.
I MAY HAVE THOUGHT I DIDN'T DESERVE TO LIVE... I MAY HAVE SAID THE WORDS OUT LOUD... BUT DEEP DOWN, I DIDN'T WANT TO HURT MYSELF.
I FELT THE SAME LAST NIGHT AFTER I DISCOVERED WE'D KILLED. HORRIFIED...BUT NOT SUICIDAL.
THAT TERRIFIES ME...MORE THAN ANYTHING.
IT MEANS... I'M OKAY WITH KILLING...AND EATING...SO I CAN SURVIVE.

...FOOLISH CHILD...
D-DON'T H-HURT F-FRIENDS, ZINN. AND N-NO CHILDREN.
THAT'S ALL I ASK.
HELP ME D-DO THAT. P-PLEASE.

MISS?
:GASP:
STAY AWAY FROM ME, LITTLE FOX.
DON'T WORRY, I WAS READY TO RUN IF YOU TRIED TO EAT ME.
I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW MISTER CORVIN IS MEETING WITH EVERYONE AT THE GATE. I THINK HE COULD USE YOUR HELP.
HMMM. HAVE YOU FOUND YOUR FOXES?
NOT YET. I THINK THEY MIGHT BE OUTSIDE THE WALLS. I'M GOING TO USE THE TUNNEL IN UBASTI'S TEMPLE, AND GO LOOKING.
ABSOLUTELY NOT.
YOU SAY "NO" AN AWFUL LOT FOR SOMEONE WHO NEVER LISTENS TO ANYONE.
:GASP:
MISS, IT'S NOT HERE. WE'RE SAFE.
I NEVER PAID ATTENTION TO THE PRIESTS.
HOW MANY OLD GODS DID THEY RECORD IN THEIR HOLY BOOKS?
HUNDREDS, MISS.
BUT THE POETS SAY THERE ARE MORE LEFT UNSEEN.

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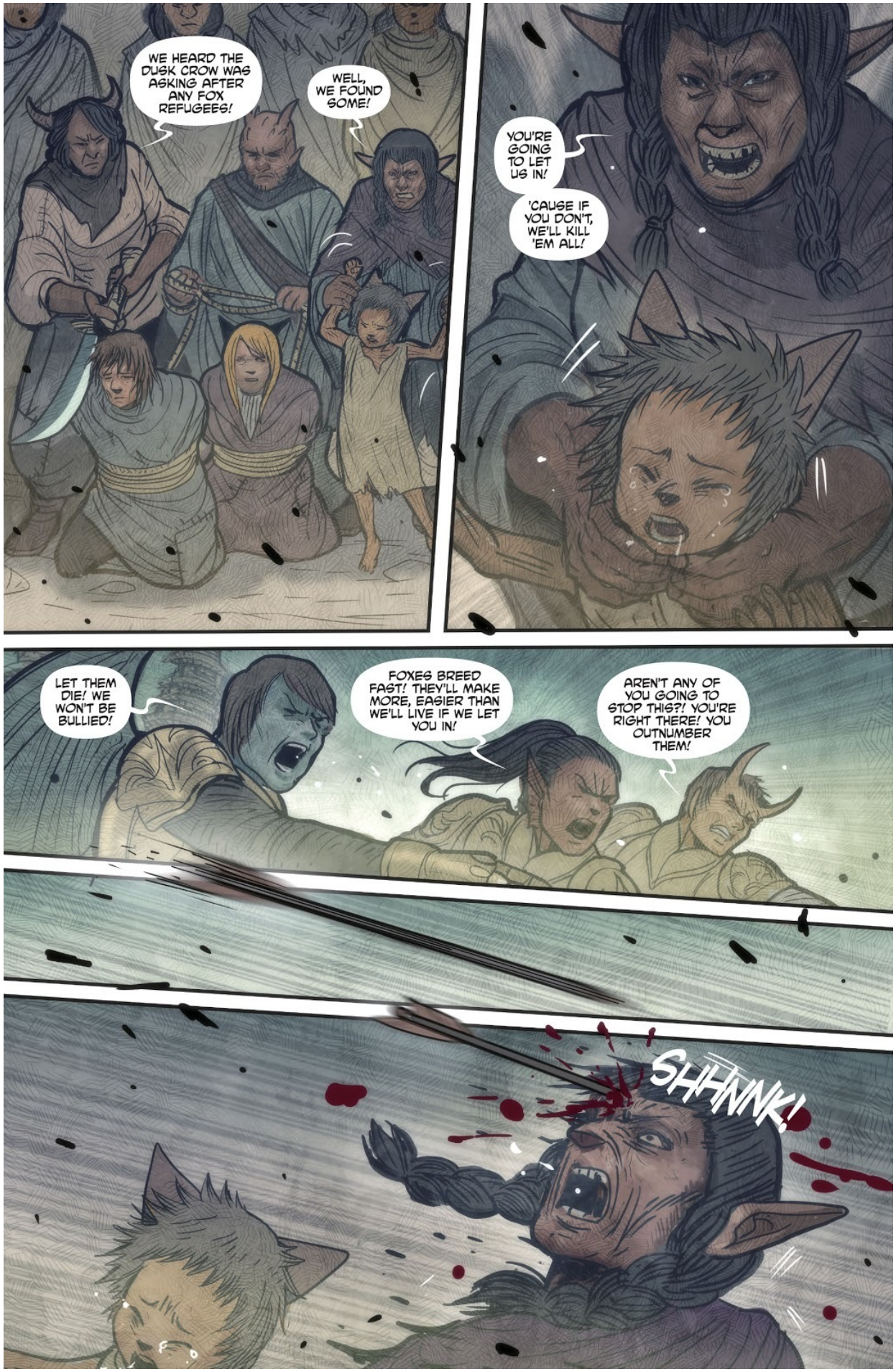
WE NEED A UNIFIED SHOW OF FORCE AGAINST THE FEDERATION!
WE NEED TO END THIS PANIC, STAY CALM, AND COOPERATE!
COOPERATE?
TALK TO US ABOUT COOPERATION WHEN WE'RE SAFE INSIDE THE CITY!
WE FARM THE LANDS, WE PUT FOOD ON YOUR TABLES! SOME OF YOU ARE FAMILY!
AND YOU BASTARDS WANT US TO DIE! YOU MIGHT AS WELL SHOOT US NOW, IF YOU LEAVE US OUT HERE!
SHOOT YOURSELVES! WE HAVE TO SAVE OUR WEAPONS FOR THE REAL FIGHT!
ENOUGH! THERE'S NO TIME FOR THIS!
THIS CITY ISN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR US ALL! YOU KNOW THAT! DON'T BE SELFISH!
YOU STILL HAVE TIME TO RUN!
WE NEED TO STOP FIGHTING --
CORVIN. OVER HERE.

THIS IS INSANITY.
WHAT'S INSANE IS THAT THIS IS WHAT WE HAVE TO WORK WITH.
WE?
DID YOU EVER STUDY THE FIRST TWILIGHT WAR BETWEEN THE COURTS?
DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT GENERAL XILA DID DURING THE SPRING SIEGE?
ER...OF COURSE.
I STUDIED IT, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I REMEMBER IT.
CHANCES ARE, NO ONE OUT THERE REMEMBERS IT, EITHER.
WAIT, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM, CORVIN. YOU'RE TOO SWEET.
SWEET?
THESE PEOPLE DON'T FEAR YOU. YOU'LL INSPIRE THEM -- EVENTUALLY -- BUT WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THAT.
BUT YOU'RE NOT A LEADER.
YOU'RE RIGHT. I'M A FIGHTER.
BUT THAT'S WHAT YOU'VE WANTED, ALL ALONG, FOR THIS WAR. DON'T LOSE YOUR NERVE NOW, CORVIN.
HEY, YOU GODDESS-DAMNED BASTARDS!


WE HEARD THE DUSK CROW WAS ASKING AFTER ANY FOX REFUGEES!
WELL, WE FOUND SOME!
YOU'RE GOING TO LET US IN!
'CAUSE IF YOU DON'T, WE'LL KILL 'EM ALL!
LET THEM DIE! WE WON'T BE BULLIED!
FOXES BREED FAST! THEY'LL MAKE MORE, EASIER THAN WE'LL LIVE IF WE LET YOU IN!
AREN'T ANY OF YOU GOING TO STOP THIS?! YOU'RE RIGHT THERE! YOU OUTNUMBER THEM!
SHHNNK!

ARE YOU DONE?
ALL OF YOU, SHIT-FACES, SHUT YOUR FUCKING MOUTHS AND LINE UP.
AND WHO ARE YOU? ANOTHER STRANGER FROM THE DUSK COURT? AN ELITE WHO SLEEPS IN SILK AND PRETENDS TO CARE?
MAYBE I'LL JUST THROW YOU OVER THE WALL --
KWHAM!
FROM THIS MOMENT ON, EVERYONE OVER THE AGE OF TWELVE MUST FIGHT.
IF YOU DON'T FIGHT, YOU LEAVE.
ZINN, ARE YOU WITH ME? WAKE UP, YOU BASTARD, I NEED YOU.
...LEAVE ME...BE...
NO. LEND ME YOUR VOICE.
YOU PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE WALL...I'M ONLY GOING TO SAY THIS ONCE...
...YOUR CHILDREN CAN ENTER THE CITY...BUT ONLY IF YOU TAKE UP ARMS.
IF A SINGLE ADULT REFUSES, READY YOUR BABIES FOR THE COLLAR.
I'LL FEED THEM TO THE WITCHES MYSELF.

WELL, NOW WE KNOW WHY THE WARLORD WANTS HER.
HOW ARE WE GOING TO CAPTURE... THAT?
WE AREN'T... NOT YET. THIS IS THE FRONTIER OF WAR, VELA. WILL THE GREY RIDERS RUN FROM A BATTLE WITH THE FEDERATION?
Y-YOU HAVE N-NO RIGHT TO M-MAKE DECISIONS FOR US -- YOU'RE NOT F-FROM HERE, YOU CH-CHANGELING --
CHNKK
SHHLLLLRRRP

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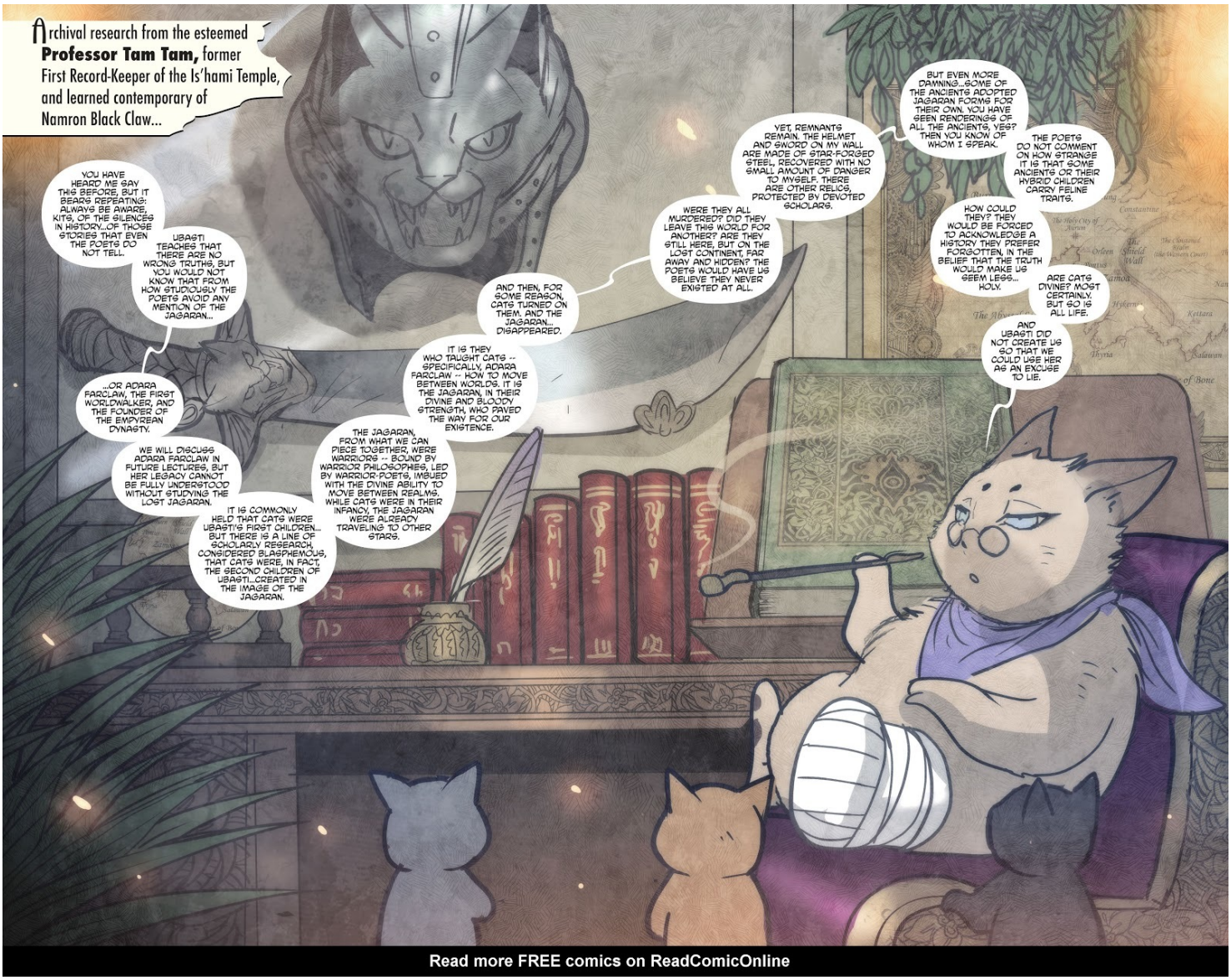
KILL THOSE IDIOTS WHO THREATENED THE FOXES.
AND THEN REPORT TO THE GATE TO REGISTER FOR BATTLE.
BUT... WE WERE ONLY TRYING TO HELP...
AIEEEEEE!
AIEEE!
YAHH!
NOW, WE CAN START.
INDEED.
MIGS? HOW COULD YOU KILL ALL THOSE PEOPLE?
THEY WERE JUST FRIGHTENED, EVEN THE ONES THREATENING THE FOXES.
KIPPA.
IN WAR, NO ONE WANTS A FRIEND.

THEY ONLY WANT KILLERS WHO WILL HELP THEM SURVIVE.
TO BE CONTINUED...


Archival research from the esteemed **Professor Tam Tam,** former First Record-Keeper of the Is'hami Temple, and learned contemporary of Namron Black Claw...
YOU HAVE HEARD ME SAY THIS BEFORE, BUT IT BEARS REPEATING: ALWAYS BE AWARE, KITS, OF THE SILENCES IN HISTORY...OF THOSE STORIES THAT EVEN THE POETS DO NOT TELL.
UBASTI TEACHES THAT THERE ARE NO WRONG TRUTHS, BUT YOU WOULD NOT KNOW THAT FROM HOW STUDIOUSLY THE POETS AVOID ANY MENTION OF THE JAGARAN...
...OR ADARA FARCLAW, THE FIRST WORLDWALKER, AND THE FOUNDER OF THE EMPYREAN DYNASTY.
WE WILL DISCUSS ADARA FARCLAW IN FUTURE LECTURES, BUT HER LEGACY CANNOT BE FULLY UNDERSTOOD WITHOUT STUDYING THE LOST JAGARAN.
IT IS COMMONLY HELD THAT CATS WERE UBASTI'S FIRST CHILDREN... BUT THERE IS A LINE OF SCHOLARLY RESEARCH, CONSIDERED BLASPHEMOUS, THAT CATS WERE, IN FACT, THE SECOND CHILDREN OF UBASTI...CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF THE JAGARAN.
THE JAGARAN, FROM WHAT WE CAN PIECE TOGETHER, WERE WARRIORS -- BOUND BY WARRIOR PHILOSOPHIES, LED BY WARRIOR-POETS, IMBUED WITH THE DIVINE ABILITY TO MOVE BETWEEN REALMS. WHILE CATS WERE IN THEIR INFANCY, THE JAGARAN WERE ALREADY TRAVELING TO OTHER STARS.
IT IS THEY WHO TAUGHT CATS -- SPECIFICALLY, ADARA FARCLAW -- HOW TO MOVE BETWEEN WORLDS. IT IS THE JAGARAN, IN THEIR DIVINE AND BLOODY STRENGTH, WHO PAVED THE WAY FOR OUR EXISTENCE.
AND THEN, FOR SOME REASON, CATS TURNED ON THEM. AND THE JAGARAN... DISAPPEARED.
WERE THEY ALL MURDERED? DID THEY LEAVE THIS WORLD FOR ANOTHER? ARE THEY STILL HERE, BUT ON THE LOST CONTINENT, FAR AWAY AND HIDDEN? THE POETS WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE THEY NEVER EXISTED AT ALL.
YET, REMNANTS REMAIN. THE HELMET AND SWORD ON MY WALL ARE MADE OF STAR-FORGED STEEL, RECOVERED WITH NO SMALL AMOUNT OF DANGER TO MYSELF. THERE ARE OTHER RELICS, PROTECTED BY DEVOTED SCHOLARS.
BUT EVEN MORE DAMNING...SOME OF THE ANCIENTS ADOPTED JAGARAN FORMS FOR THEIR OWN. YOU HAVE SEEN RENDERINGS OF ALL THE ANCIENTS, YES? THEN YOU KNOW OF WHOM I SPEAK.
THE POETS DO NOT COMMENT ON HOW STRANGE IT IS THAT SOME ANCIENTS OR THEIR HYBRID CHILDREN CARRY FELINE TRAITS.
HOW COULD THEY? THEY WOULD BE FORCED TO ACKNOWLEDGE A HISTORY THEY PREFER FORGOTTEN, IN THE BELIEF THAT THE TRUTH WOULD MAKE US SEEM LESS... HOLY.
ARE CATS DIVINE? MOST CERTAINLY. BUT SO IS ALL LIFE.
AND UBASTI DID NOT CREATE US SO THAT WE COULD USE HER AS AN EXCUSE TO LIE.

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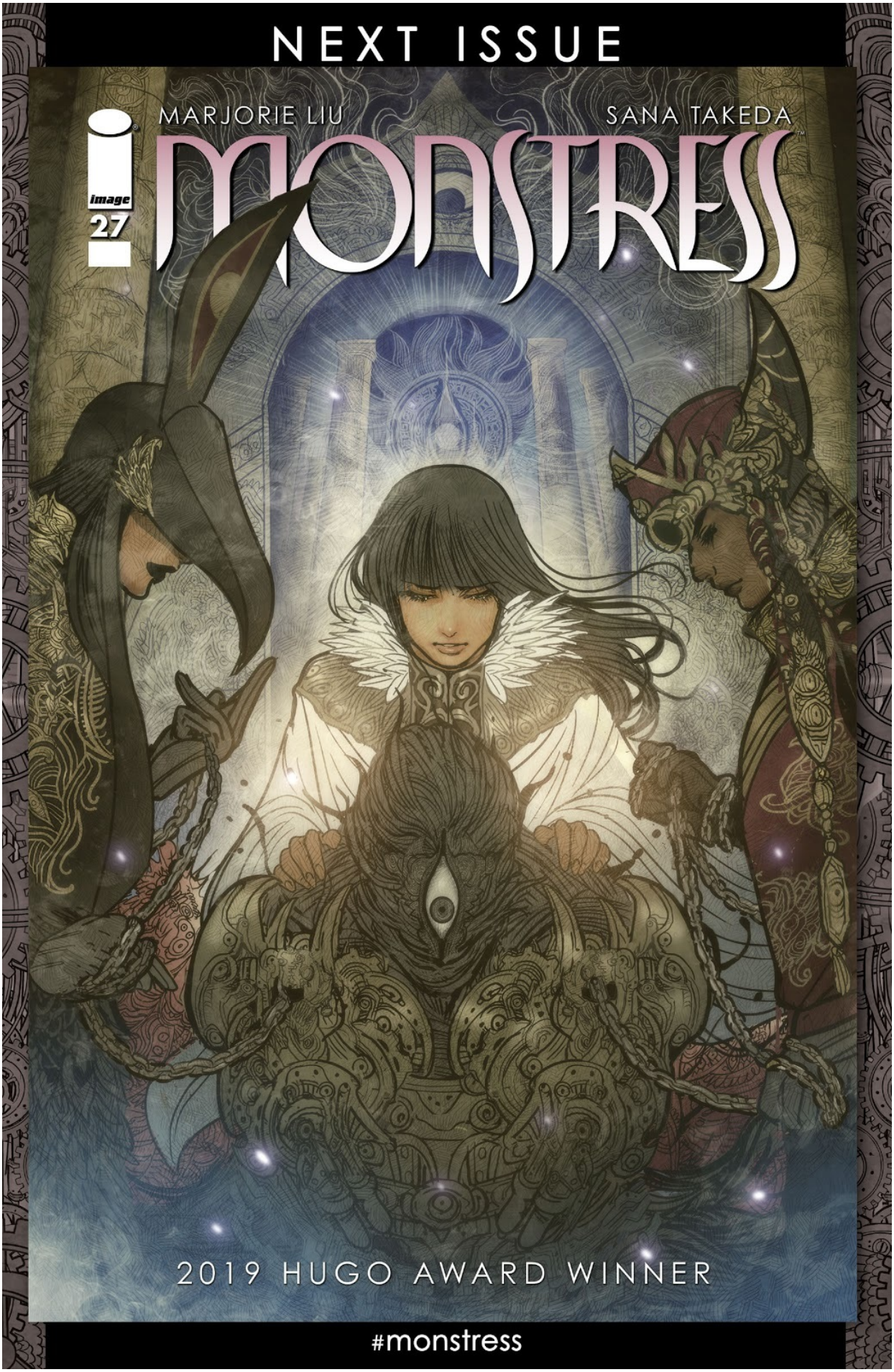
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